

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3 CLOSE-OUT REPORT

USAID/BANGLADESH – February 2003

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### I. BASIC IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

SO 388-003:	Improved representation of interests of women and the rural poor. <sup>1</sup>
Geographic Area:	Bangladesh (country-wide program)
Approval Date:	January 18, 1996
Performance Period:	FY 1996 to FY 2002
Last Obligation:	FY 2000

### II. HISTORY OF THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

SO3 was created in 1996 by combining two existing SOs: a) “enhanced participation in local decision-making,” and b) “more accessible and equitable justice, especially for women,” as part of a broader effort to streamline USAID/Bangladesh’s strategic framework. The SO was altered a number of times over its life in an effort to tighten its focus. (These adjustments are explained in the section below, entitled “Changes in the Strategic Framework.”) In 1998, SO funding levels were cut below those originally anticipated at the time of its creation. As a result, SO staffing and SO support to NGOs was reduced below planned levels. Finally, near the end of its life, SO3 was superseded by the creation of a new strategic objective (SO9), which absorbed all SO3 activities except the Democracy Partnership program.

The Democracy Partnership program, implemented by The Asia Foundation, was the cornerstone of SO3. This initiative sought to strengthen ties between NGOs, community associations and locally elected bodies and to improve the quality of informal judicial systems by transforming village arbitration councils and by developing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

Initially, other activities under SO3 included efforts to protect human rights, promote transparent local government and increase parliamentary responsiveness to citizens. Implementing partners included the American Center for Labor Solidarity, the National Democratic Institute, Transparency International Bangladesh, the Khan Foundation, Red Barnet and the National Women’s Lawyers Association. However, after the creation of SO9 in 2000, these activities were moved to the new SO, and only the Democracy Partnership program remained under SO3.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Partnership program accounted for approximately 85% of the funds obligated under the SO, this report will focus primarily on the impact and lessons learned from this program.

### III. CHANGES IN THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

SO3 was created in 1996 as part of a Mission-wide effort to streamline its strategic framework. The result was the creation of single democracy and governance SO with six intermediate results:

SO3: Broadened participation in local decision making and more equitable justice, especially for women in targeted areas.  
IR 3.1: Advocacy of customer interests strengthened.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the final text of the SO. The language of the SO went through a number of changes over its life.

<sup>2</sup> Activities were moved from SO3 to SO9 gradually beginning in 2000. By 2001, all activities other than the Democracy Partnership had been shifted to SO9.

- IR 3.2: Quality of elections enhanced.
- IR 3.3: Competence of local elected bodies to identify and meet customer needs strengthened.
- IR 3.4: Awareness of legal rights and obligations increased.
- IR 3.5: Quality of alternative dispute resolution improved.
- IR 3.6: The ability of garment workers to vindicate their rights through the strengthening of independent sustainable labor organizations increased.

In 1998, consultants were brought in to assist in streamlining the Results Framework and to create a more rigorous performance monitoring system. It was hoped that as SO programs expanded, the changes would make it easier to measure SO progress and to identify best practices. These changes led to a restatement of the SO and a reduction in the number of IRs from six to four.

- Revised SO3: Improved representation of interests of women and the rural poor
- IR 3.1: Responsiveness of local elected bodies and government institutions increased.
  - IR 3.2: Quality of elections enhanced.
  - IR 3.3: Access to justice improved.
  - IR 3.4: Independent garment workers' unions strengthened.

During the development of the USAID/Bangladesh Strategic Plan (FY 2000 to FY 2005), the democracy and governance program again underwent a change. In April 2000, SO9, "Strengthened Institutions of Democracy," was approved. During 2000 and 2001, all activities under SO3 except the Partnership program were shifted to the new SO. In FY 2002, when SO3 ended, the Democracy Partnership was the only remaining activity, and it was the only activity to have been completed under SO3.

#### IV. TOTAL SO COSTS:

The figures below show that \$11,688,273 was obligated under SO3. Almost 95% of these funds were DA resources, with the remaining funds consisting of ESF resources. Of the total obligations, \$9,987,395, or 85%, were obligated under the Democracy Partnership program. The total cost sharing contribution of The Asia Foundation for the Democracy Partnership program was \$1,486,232. (Figures in the tables below do not include cost sharing data and are current as of 12/31/02.)

	Obligated	Estimated Expenditures
<b>TOTAL SO3 FUNDS</b>	<b>\$11,688,273</b>	<b>\$11,622,712</b>
• DA	\$11,040,004	\$11,001,856
• ESF	\$648,269	\$620,856

	Obligated	Estimated Expenditures
<b>TOTAL SO3 FUNDS</b>	<b>\$11,688,273</b>	<b>\$11,622,712</b>
• Democracy Partnership	\$9,987,395	\$9,973,710
• Other SO3 Programs <sup>3</sup>	\$1,700,878	\$1,649,002

<sup>3</sup> "Other" includes activities managed by the Khan Foundation, Management Systems International, the National Democratic Institute, Red Barnet, Transparency International Bangladesh and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association as well as PSCs, audits, evaluations, and other miscellaneous expenses.

## V. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE PARTNERS AND ACTIVITIES

Since the Democracy Partnership received the vast majority of SO3 funds, the discussion that follows is weighted accordingly.

**The Asia Foundation.** The Democracy Partnership was a seven-year program (1995-2002) that sought to strengthen ties between NGOs, community associations and locally elected bodies and to improve the quality of informal judicial systems by transforming village arbitration councils and by developing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. The Partnership was the first comprehensive effort in Bangladesh seeking to improve local governance in rural communities. A major emphasis of the Democracy Partnership was to broaden participation of socially and economically disadvantaged Bangladeshis, particularly the rural poor and women, in local democratic institutions and processes. By working directly with existing indigenous organizations, the Democracy Partnership was able to reach some of Bangladesh's poorest and most marginalized citizens. Over the life of the program, 127 grants were given to 29 local organizations. (See Annex 1 for a list of these organizations.)

The Democracy Partnership structured its activities around the following five areas:

- Citizen Advocacy. Program activities helped partner NGOs organize citizens groups to engage local elected bodies. Training and awareness-raising activities were provided to help inform citizens of the roles and responsibilities of their elected representatives and to encourage and empower citizens to participate more fully in their own governmental processes.
- Free and Fair Elections. Program activities sought to: 1) provide effective voter education programs (with particular focus on women); 2) improve the quality of election monitoring and reporting, and 3) advocate for reform of structural and institutional barriers to the free and full participation of the electorate. Eight NGOs participated in these activities. Most efforts in this area were focused on the 1997 Union Parishad (local government council) elections.
- Performance and Accountability of Local Elected Bodies. Program activities helped strengthen the ties between local governments and community-based NGOs. Special attention was given to improving the capacity of women to participate in local government. Activities included helping local officials: 1) better understand their official roles and responsibilities; 2) devise budgets and workplans for development projects, and 3) improve their ability to communicate with their constituents. In addition, meetings were arranged between community leaders, NGOs and local officials to exchange ideas on issues affecting their communities.
- Awareness of Legal Rights. Program activities sought to improve access to justice in rural areas by increasing the public's awareness of their legal rights and by increasing the poor's access to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. In addition, the program helped local NGO partners reduce barriers to accessing the formal legal system by offering legal aid.
- Promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution. Program activities sought to improve traditional dispute resolution mechanisms (called shalish), which were based on the principle of arbitration, by introducing new mechanisms based on the principle of mediation. The new approach sought to substitute the win/lose outcomes associated with arbitration with ones that sought to resolve conflict through participatory negotiating exercises. The goal was the creation of a consensus between the opposing parties.

**American Center for International Labor Solidarity.** ACILS's work under SO3 centered on the rights of urban garment workers. The initial program focused almost exclusively on the creation and development of the country's first politically independent labor federation, the Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF). This work occurred in an environment where labor unions were highly undemocratic and served as tools of the major political parties. (The ACILS program was shifted to SO9/IR3, and when it moved, all work under IR4 ended.)

**Khan Foundation.** The Khan Foundation's efforts focused on strengthening the capacity of local government councils (called Union Parishads) and their elected members. (This program was moved to SO9/IR1.)

**National Democratic Institute.** The National Democratic Institute's work under SO3 sought to strengthen the capacity of political parties to participate in the activities of Parliament. (This program was moved to SO9/IR2.)

**Red Barnet and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association.** Activities undertaken by these organizations sought to prevent the trafficking of women and children. (These programs were moved to SO9/IR3.)

**Transparency International Bangladesh.** Transparency International Bangladesh's work under SO3 focused on anti-corruption activities. (This program moved to SO9/IR2.)

## VI. IMPACTS OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ACTIVITIES

The Democracy Partnership was the first donor-funded comprehensive democracy program in Bangladesh to involve numerous NGOs in issues such as elections, improved local elected bodies and alternative dispute resolution. The Partnership achieved impressive results, especially in terms of improving the quality of local government and encouraging the adoption of "best practices" by local government councils.

As noted above, the Democracy Partnership structured its activities around five areas. The following are the major programmatic impacts in these five areas:

- Citizen Advocacy. Interventions helped to improve: 1) tax collection; 2) water quality and sanitation; 3) local roads; and 4) the effectiveness of flood relief. Advocacy efforts under the program were also highly effective in promoting grassroots development in ways that could not be achieved through national-level efforts. As a result of these efforts, citizens now better understand what they can expect from their local leaders in terms of service delivery and protection of rights, and they are better able to launch their own campaigns on issues that emerge in their communities.
- Free and Fair Elections. Interventions provided rural Bangladeshis with a better understanding of their rights, roles, and responsibilities in the electoral process and helped create a more educated and informed population in future elections. In addition, the base of individuals serving as local elected officials was broadened, resulting in improvements in governance for common citizens. The DP was instrumental in strengthening a network of organizations with countrywide election monitoring capacity. In the 1996 elections, two partner NGOs fielded about 30,000 observers. For the 1997 UP elections, the number increased to almost 34,000 and a strategy was coordinated to field one election observer in every polling station. Many of the partner NGOs also fielded small teams of election monitors.
- Performance and Accountability of Local Elected Bodies. Interventions helped to increase the ability of participating NGOs to positively influence local government. NGOs now view local governments as an integral part of their community development programs, and local governments have begun to see NGOs as valuable partners. Interventions also helped local government councils to become more democratic and effective and helped increase public confidence in their activities. In looking at the utilization of best practices among LEBs, the percentage of local government councils using five or more best practices (out of a total of 14) rose to 96% in 2000, up from 70% in 1999 and 34% in 1998. The average number of best practices being used increased to 9.88 in 2000, up from 8.57 in 1999 and 2.98 in 1998.
- Increasing Awareness of Legal Rights. Interventions helped make disadvantaged rural populations more aware of their legal rights. Individuals learned what kinds of protection the law affords them, where they should go for assistance, how to deal with the police and how to effectively participate in alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. A SO-level indicator in this area showed that 88% of all marriages surveyed in the legal awareness program were registered in 1999, versus the control sample of 59%.

- Promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution. Program interventions helped to change the traditional mediation system in Bangladesh, ensuring the participation of women and people other than the ruling elite on the mediation committees, and initiating training to sensitize community leaders to gender equity and issues involving the disadvantaged. These activities transformed justice delivery to the poor by offering more accessible and beneficial alternatives. In areas with alternative dispute resolution programs, confidence in local justice processes was 58.9% in 1999 and 64.1% in 2000 compared to a baseline control sample in 1998 of 45%.

Impacts of other programs funded under SO3 led to progress in combating the trafficking of women and children as well as in fighting corruption. Important strides were also taken towards reducing child labor and strengthening the role of unions in the garment sector. However, since the responsible activities in these areas were transferred to SO9 and remain on-going, their ultimate impact will be assessed later in the SO9 closeout report.

## **VII. SUSTAINABILITY OF SO ACTIVITIES**

The sustainability of the Democracy Partnership activities funded under SO3 is the most important legacy of the strategic objective. More specifically:

- The Democracy Partnership pioneered a wide range of DG programs currently being implemented in Bangladesh today. Encouraged by the success of the Democracy Partnership program, donor agencies like the UNDP, DFID, DANIDA, NORAD and SDC for the first time have developed and funded through the NGOs new programs for democratization at the grassroots level, improved local governance and informal justice systems.
- In addition, the Democracy Partnership introduced numerous NGOs to democracy issues, and these NGOs now consider democracy promotion to be a fundamental part of their core development activities. Organizations such as CARE/Bangladesh, Rupantar, BNPS, Banchte Shekha, WAVE, BLAST, BNWLA, FEMA, and ASK are continuing the same or similar activities they started under the Democracy Partnership with funding from other donors or with their own resources.
- The Partnership also inspired the formation of several democracy coalitions/networks including the Democracy Forum, the Governance Coalition, the Local Government Support Group, etc. and advanced techniques used locally in several areas of governance and human rights. Several NGOs and NGO coalitions are monitoring the 2003 UP elections fielding more than 100,000 election observers.
- The Partnership has also had significant and lasting impacts on the way many NGOs in Bangladesh approach their grassroots activities. The previous pessimism about local governance activities felt by many NGOs has been replaced by confidence. In addition, the reports produced by TAF under the Partnership program have substantially increased the understanding of local-level DG issues in Bangladesh.

## **VIII. SUMMARY AND USEFULNESS OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Performance indicators for SO3 were altered a number of times because of changes to the results framework. The following performance indicators are the final ones developed for SO3.

- SO: "Improved representation of interests of women and the rural poor."  
 Indicator A: Customer confidence in local elected bodies' responsiveness  
 Indicator B: Customer confidence in local electoral processes  
 Indicator C: Customer confidence in local justice processes  
 Indicator D: Percent of marriages registered  
 Indicator E: Number of members of DP-supported associations elected to LEBs

- IR 3.1: “Responsiveness of local elected bodies and government institutions increased.”  
Indicator A: Percent of local elected bodies using “best practices”  
Indicator B: Number of collective action initiatives by DP-supported NGOs aimed at LEB or government institutions
- IR 3.2: “Quality of elections enhanced.”  
Indicator A: Percent of eligible voters having knowledge of LEB candidates’ characteristics  
Indicator B: Percent of eligible voters aware of roles and responsibilities of LEB members
- IR 3.3: “Access to justice improved.”  
Indicator A: Number of clients served in dispute resolution cases  
Indicator B: Percent of customers aware of legal rights  
Indicator C: Percent of dispute resolutions involving women that result in decisions satisfactory to the women
- IR 3.4 “Independent garment workers’ unions strengthened.”  
Indicator A: Number of BIGUF members increased  
Indicator B: Members’ confidence in BIGUF’s effectiveness

Substantial programmatic results were achieved under SO3. However, these achievements were not always fully captured by the results indicators associated with the SO. One reason was the frequent changes to the results framework and the decision to move the majority of activities under SO3 to SO9. Therefore, progress under the various IRs was not continuously measured throughout the life of the SO. Another limitation of the indicators was that the broad nature of the Partnership program and the inter-linkages among its components made it difficult to capture and measure the overall impacts through specific IR-level indicators.

## **IX. LESSONS LEARNED:**

Perhaps the most important lessons learned under SO3 are captured under the “Impacts” and “Sustainability” sections above. Activities under SO3, particularly the Partnership program, provided enormously important lessons learned in terms of expanding the level of understanding about the possibilities of, and approaches to, strengthening democracy and governance at the local level in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, uncertain availability of funding kept the Democracy Partnership from realizing its full potential.

The following are other lessons learned from SO3:

- The USAID/Bangladesh DG/ED Team must work closely with State and the Embassy in the search for DG funds and to help coordinate among various USG agencies. Although USAID/Bangladesh’s democracy budget is modest, combined USG resources can be more substantial.
- DG activities should not be spread over too many sub-sectors nor across too many NGOs. The DG program must be focused.
- In order to affect change at the national level, numerous local human rights activities must be linked and coordinated – a daunting challenge.
- The DG horizon must be long term, and activities should not focus on achieving short-term successes. Progress in DG programs is frequently uneven and unpredictable, and this fact must be taken into account in monitoring and evaluation activities.
- The USG has a major competitive advantage in providing DG assistance, given both our experience and commitment to human rights and the promotion of democratic values.
- Progress in all other sectors in Bangladesh is threatened if democracy does not continue to develop and gain strength.

#### **X. RELATED STUDIES AND ASSESSMENTS:**

- *Democracy and Governance Strategic Assessment for USAID/Bangladesh*, prepared by Management Systems International, August 1999.
- *Voices of Women: A New Era of Political Leadership in Bangladesh*, prepared by TAF, December 2001.
- *Elections: Best Practices under the Democracy Partnership*, prepared by TAF, March 2002.
- *Protecting the Common Good: Successes in Public Interest Litigation*, prepared by TAF, March 2002.
- *Access to Justice: Best Practices under the Democracy Partnership*, prepared by TAF, April 2002.
- *The Democracy Partnership, Final Report*, prepared by TAF, April 2002.
- *The Democracy Partnership: Innovations in Local Government Reform*, prepared by TAF, April 2002.
- *In Search of Justice: Women's Encounters with Alternative Dispute Resolution*, prepared by TAF, April 2002.
- *National Advocacy: A Path to Reform*, prepared by TAF, April 2002.
- *Responsive and Accountable Governance: Best Practices under the Democracy Partnership*, prepared by TAF, April 2002.

#### **XI. CLOSE-OUT REPORTING INSTRUMENTS:**

The only activity to be closed out under SO3 was TAF's Democracy Partnership, a seven-year activity that ended on September 30, 2002 (Cooperative Agreement #: 388-A-00-95-00040). TAF submitted a final report on the program to USAID/Bangladesh on April 30, 2002.

#### **XII. HUMAN RESOURCE CONTACTS:**

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**Rezaul Haque.** Senior Democracy Advisor, USAID/Bangladesh DG Team.

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**Riffat Sulaiman.** Contracting Specialist, USAID/Bangladesh.

**The Democracy Partnership's Implementing Partners**

Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK)  
Ain O Uannayan Sangasta (AOUS)/Institute of Law and Development (ILD)  
Banchte Shekha  
Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS)  
Bangladesh Centre for Communication Programs (BCCP)  
Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA)  
Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)  
Bangladesh Manabodhikar Somanay Parishad (BMSP)/Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB)  
Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS)  
Bangladesh Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA)  
CARE's UPWARD project  
Centre for Development Services (CDS)  
International Voluntary Services (IVS)  
Kabi Sukanta Seba Sangha (KSSS)  
Legal Awareness Forum (LAF)  
Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA)  
Manabik Shahajya Sangstha/Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (MSS/FEMA)  
Multi-Disciplinary Action Research Centre (MARC)  
Palashipara Samaj Kallayan Samity (PSKS)  
Palli Shishu Foundation (PSF)  
Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB)  
PRIP Trust  
Rangpur Dinajur Rural Service (RDRS)  
Rupantar  
Samata (SSKS)  
Shariatpur Development Society (SDS)  
Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD)  
Uttaran  
Welfare Association of Village Environment (WAVE)